O.C. Haley Blvd. Streetscape Project

Response to Public Questions/Comments

The City of New Orleans, Department of Public Works (DPW), hosted a public meeting to discuss the OC Haley Blvd. Streetscape project on April 30, 2013. At the public meeting, the DPW presented a proposed scope of work to improve OC Haley Blvd. from Calliope St. to St. Andrews St. in New Orleans. A copy of the proposed scope as described at the OC Haley Blvd. Streetscape NEPA Section 106 public meeting is available here.

Below are responses to the questions/comments received at that meeting and in the subsequent public comment period which ended on May 15, 2013.

1. Will trees be planted in the existing rain gardens?

DPW is working closely with the City's Department of Parks and Parkways, Ground Works New Orleans and Parkway Partners to replant, adopt and maintain the existing rain gardens. The OC Haley Streetscape project will make minor modifications to the rain gardens such as repairing broken bricks and making cuts into the curb to facilitate drainage. Ground Works New Orleans has committed to maintaining the rain gardens once the construction project is complete. If at any time the rain gardens fall into disrepair they will be removed from the site.

2. Will the neutral ground (median) be graded in a way to allow it to store or detain water?

Yes, the new, 16 ft. wide medians will help calm traffic, provide added safety for pedestrians crossing OC Haley Blvd. at the intersections and detain more water than their predecessors. The additional trees and grass will help detain/retain water.

3. Would it be possible to use permeable pavers, instead of stamped concrete in the neutral ground between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. to store water?

Permeable pavement would require installation of a new drainage system beneath the roadway. New drainage is outside the scope of this project however the additional width of the neutral grounds the length of the project, and new trees in the neutral grounds will store more water, improving drainage in the area.

4. Would removing the median between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. encourage vagrancy in the neighborhood?

No, the purpose of the streetscape is to increase the economic vitality of the OC Haley Blvd. corridor. Additionally, based on feedback received at the April 2013 public meeting and during the public comment period, the median between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. will no longer be flush with the roadway. The median will include a 6 inch vertical curb which will improve pedestrian access on the corridor, fulfilling the intention of the City's Complete Streets policy. Learn more about the Complete Streets policy here.

5. I ask that banner poles be installed in the median and median noses/refuges. I am very pleased with the plan concepts as presented and especially like retention of 3 blocks of festival space.

Thank you for your comment. DPW will consider adding other streetscape components, such as garbage receptacles, banner poles and benches while the project is in construction if the budget allows.

6. I am concerned installing a hard surface in the median between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. will encourage drivers to park in the median or make U-turns in the middle of the block.

Thank you for your comment. In response to this request and others, the neutral ground between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. will no longer be flush with the roadway as presented at the public meeting. The neutral ground will be widened to 16 ft and a 6 inch vertical curb will be established to prevent drivers from parking on the neutral ground or making illegal U-turns.

7. Why keep the rain gardens that are poorly maintained when they resemble blight?

Please see the response to Question 1.

8. Why aren't streetlights part of the OC Haley Blvd. Streetscape project scope?

Streetlights were considered as an option during the design phase of this project. However, they will now be addressed as part of the City-wide LED streetlight conversion project. To learn more about the **Energy Smart Streetlight Conversion** program click here.

9. What are high visibility crosswalks?

See the image of high visibility crosswalks at the right. High visibility crosswalks include placement of larger striping which increases visibility to motorists approaching the intersection, especially at night. Use of high visibility crosswalks improves pedestrian access to the transportation system and is consistent with the City's Complete Streets program. Learn more about the Complete Streets program here.



10. Are there any opportunities to repave the roadway as part of the OC Haley Blvd. Streetscape project?

Minor street paving will take place at intersections and on the side streets when the Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant curb ramps are installed. Re-paving OC Haley Blvd. is outside the scope of this project.

11. Will reducing traffic to one lane reduce speeding through the corridor? Can speed bumps be added as well?

By reducing the roadway to one travel lane, adding a bike lane, maintaining a curbside parking lane and expanding the width of the neutral ground will calm traffic through the corridor.

The use of speed bumps in residential neighborhoods have been challenged by the Americans with Disabilities Act, have been found to not significantly reduce speeds and have been known to increase noise levels 10 to 20 decibels when the wheels hit the pavement making the installation of the speed bumps particularly bothersome to nearby residents. In response, the City does not install speed bumps on public roadways.

12. How will an existing business be protected during construction?

Pre-construction photos will be taken of every business/building being affected by the construction of this project. It is the responsibility of the contractor to avoid damage to buildings. This is done with the assistance of independent construction inspectors on-site at all times.

The Contractor is also required to maintain access to all businesses during construction per City and DPW specifications. In general, the Contractor will provide ramps over excavated sidewalks and driveways for business patrons to use while working in a specific area.



13. Have you considered protecting the bike lanes by placing the parking in between the curb and the parking lane?

What you describe is a protected bike lane. On this corridor a protected bike lane is not the safest option for bicyclists and pedestrians because of sight distance and conflict point issues. The current design, establishing a dedicated bike lane, is the safest option to use given the constraints and demands of the roadway.

14. The rain gardens are junky looking and don't improve the boulevard's image or aesthetics. Please consider getting rid of these if they are not being maintained. They should not be a focus point. If they are kept, please do address the aged brick/broken concrete edges.

Please see the response to Question 1.

15. Please consider adding lighting to the sculpture fountain at the intersection of OC Haley Blvd. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

Thank you for your comment. The sculpture fountain is outside the OC Haley Blvd. Streetscape project limits however the OC Haley Blvd. Merchants Association has expressed an interest in fundraising to add lighting to the sculpture park. The Merchants Association can be reached here: www.ochaleyblvd.org

16. Give people a reason to linger in the sculpture fountain at the intersection of OC Haley Blvd. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. by for example, installing permanent chess/checkers tables around the fountain and/or under the mature growth trees.

Please see the response to question 15.

17. Please consider one "spur" off the boulevard onto the neutral ground in Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. park between OC Haley Blvd. and S. Rampart St. At minimum please don't forego lights on in the park. If more money is flexible, please replace and increase number of benches in park and upgrade plantings along the edges of the park.

Please see the response to question 15.

18. Has DPW thought about using the Street Light Repairs Program to fix the broken street lights on OC Haley Blvd.? This would allow the City to provide accurate lighting without taking away funds from the project budget?

Thank you for your comment. Yes, there are plans to convert the existing streetlights on OC Haley Blvd. to energy efficient, LED streetlights. Learn more about the Energy Smart Streetlight Conversion Program here.

19. Why is the median being altered only between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.? It would seem that symmetry around Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. would be better suited for plaza/festival use.

The proposed improvements to the corridor include widening the neutral ground to 16 ft and adding landscaping the entire project limits which are from St. Andrew to Calliope streets. The neutral ground between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. would be made of a concrete with a decorative scoring pattern, and include pedestrian cut-throughs to be used during the annual festival. The location for the concrete median was requested by the OC Haley Merchants Association to accommodate their annual festival and future plans for the corridor.

20. The landscaping plan should keep the trees that are healthy and eliminate the unhealthy trees. Chinese Pistache is a good choice of trees, also consider Live Oak trees

Thank you for your comment. DPW is working with the landscape architect and the Department of Parks & Parkways to determine the most appropriate landscaping plan. The healthy existing trees will remain in place and unhealthy trees will be removed and replaced with Chinese Pistachio trees along the sidewalks. The neutral grounds will be planted with willow oak trees to provide a uniform look throughout the corridor. Any plantings will take into account the waterline running in the center of the median and will also have to be approved by the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans which requires there be a minimum of 10 feet clearance from the water lines and any proposed tree plantings.

21. This project should add parking to the corridor by allowing parking in the median. Will this project provide space for a city- subsidized parking lot?

The dimensions of OC Haley Blvd. between St. Andrew and Calliope streets do not allow for median parking such as what is available on Harrison Ave. DPW is committed to providing safer and accessible routes for all users including motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians per the City's Complete Streets policy. The installation of a dedicated bike lane is expected to increase the number of bicyclists and pedestrians that visit the OC Haley Blvd. corridor.

Establishment of a city-subsidized parking lot is outside the scope of this project.

22. Speed Bumps should be added to the travel lanes of OC Haley Blvd.

DPW policy does not allow for the installation of speed bumps on a public roadway however this project does include a number of other traffic calming design elements. For example, reducing the travel to one lane and adding a bike lane, along with the expansion of the neutral ground will encourage motorists to drive slower through the corridor.

23. The project plan looks good with the exception of the rain gardens, street lighting, condition of the traffic signals and conditions of the sidewalks.

Thank you for your comments. Please see the response to Question 1 regarding the rain gardens.

The DPW is currently converting the existing streetlights into energy efficient lights. View the Energy Smart Streetlight Conversion plan here: http://www.nola.gov/dpw/streetlights/

This project scope includes painting the existing traffic signal poles which will provide a uniform look throughout the corridor.

The project scope also includes making repairs to damaged sidewalk panels.

24. I have some reservations about the proposed streetscape eliminating the median above Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. I think the placement of the event or festival space should be at the historic location of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. and O.C. Haley Blvd. I support the OCH streetscape as proposed and I am looking forward to the renovation as a catalyst in the development of our neighborhood.

Please see the response to Question 19., above.

25. Please ensure the tree plantings do not obstruct traffic.

Thank you for your comment. As part of the final approval process for the project, DPW Traffic Division will review the design plans, in conjunction with the Department of Parks & Parkways, and make recommendations for revisions including the sight distance requirements necessary for motorists to safely use any given street.

26. All streetscape design must take drainage issues into account, and in fact it should be a priority to evaluate available options for doing so. Therefore, we propose the following recommendations: a.) The curbs around the existing rain gardens should be re-designed to direct storm water into the rain gardens. b.) The city should seriously consider design options that will increase the amount of absorbent green space overall, rather than keeping it the same or reducing it for example, using previous pavers for neutral ground and sidewalks. c.) The city should also consider the fact that the flooding issues currently experienced on side streets are, and will be, directly affected by the design of the Boulevard. Drainage improvements on the Boulevard will, therefore, have a positive effect on the entire neighborhood.

Thank you for your comments. Given the limitations of the funding source and budget constraints, a major drainage analysis and reform cannot take place. However, the recommendation to provide curb cuts to all rain gardens has been incorporated into the design plans. The expansion of the neutral grounds will provide a larger amount of green space and the planting of several trees should assist with

drainage issues. Additionally, DPW will assess catch basins on the corridor and clear the ones within the project limits.

27. The presence of tree canopy in the festival area should be moved up on the list of priorities, because it is not just a matter of aesthetics, but also safety. Open, asphalt-only festival grounds will radiate heat, potentially creating unpleasant and even unsafe conditions for festival-goers. The presence of a healthy canopy will also reduce energy usage (and expenses) for businesses and residents of the Boulevard. Of course, aesthetics are also a factor, since beauty attracts visitors and celebrants as well. Many types of plantings could be considered in addition to Chinese Pistache--such as water loving cypress trees.

At the request of the OC Haley Merchants Association, the median between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd will be distinct to include colored concrete and a decorative scoring pattern. Trees planted in the neutral ground will help to alleviate drainage issues. Additionally, the DPW is working with Parks & Parkways along with the Landscape Architect on this project to provide alternatives to the types of trees being planted in the neutral grounds on OC Haley.

27. We are pleased to see the addition of bike lanes and expansion of the median to 16 ft from Erato St. to Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. It will be important to deliver a complete project under this scope of work, and thus we would advocate for funds to be allocated to plantings in the medians throughout the project. In the areas between Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. and Felicity that are losing the median, we would advocate for the addition of some plantings to create come green cover and canopy. In addition, we would like to better understand how the work will prevent the vacated area of the former neutral ground from Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. to Felicity from becoming a "passing lane" for vehicular traffic.

Tree plantings will be added to both sides of the street on the sidewalks and in the neutral grounds throughout the project area which will provide a shaded canopy and assist with drainage.

In response to this and other similar concerns, the project plans as proposed at the April 2013 public meeting have changed. The neutral ground between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. will now include a 6 inch vertical curb to prevent motorists from making illegal and unsafe mid-block Uturns.

28. While we have some reservations about the proposed streetscape eliminating the median from Felicity St. to Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., the Faubourg Lafayette Neighborhood Association supports the OC Haley Blvd. Streetscape project as proposed and is looking forward to the renovation as a catalyst in the development or our neighborhood.

Thank you for your comment. This project will assist greatly in the revitalization of the OC Haley Corridor.

In response to this and other similar concerns, the project plans as proposed at the April 2013 public meeting have changed. The neutral ground between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. will now include a 6 inch vertical curb to prevent motorists from making illegal and unsafe mid-block Uturns.

29. I am fully in favor of O.C. Haley Boulevard street improvements. However, I am concerned about the removal of the median between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King Blvd. in favor of an immovable concrete slab for festivals and events. While the ASHE Center are great stewards to their surrounding community, future proprietors of the property may not be willing – or able – to uphold the same standard. For this reason, I feel that it is best that the median remain contiguous in keeping with the context of the rest of New Orleans and along the OC Haley Blvd. corridor from Calliope to St. Andrew streets.

Thank you for your comment. In response to this and other similar concerns, the project plans as proposed at the April 2013 public meeting have changed. The neutral ground between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. will now include a 6 inch vertical curb to prevent motorists from making illegal and unsafe mid-block U-turns.

30. I'm in favor of expanding the neutral ground and adding trees; in favor of bike lanes (on both sides of the Blvd.) and against angle parking. Angled parking would be dangerous for pedestrians and bikers.

Thank you for your comments. The project scope does include widening the neutral ground from St. Andrew to Calliope streets, and the addition of trees in the neutral ground and along the sidewalks on both sides of the street. Angled parking is not considered an appropriate feature of this project and is not included in the final design.

31. Brown's Dairy must oppose the current proposed O.C. Haley Blvd. streetscape design. By increasing the median between Calliope and Thalia Street from three feet to eighteen feet, our vehicles would be prohibited from making a safe left turn off of O.C. Haley onto Thalia. As well, since the access to our market lies towards downtown, our vehicles turning right onto O.C. Haley from Thalia Street would be encumbered as well by the increased median. This same situation occurs as our vehicles turn at Erato and O.C. Haley. Our goal, as always, is to operate in a safe manner for the good of all our neighbors and employees and this type of median reduction would impede our ability to do so. The medians in the 1200 and 1300 blocks of O.C. Haley should be left at the current 3 foot dimensions so that our vehicles can maintain a safe turning situation as they leave and return to the dairy. If the medians are increased in size, there will be damage to our vehicles as well as the medians and any improvements that were made to improve the streetscape. We cannot be held liable for any damage to the medians by our vehicles due to a design that will clearly not work.

Based on our conversation today, I will offer the following solutions to my objections: a] Eliminate the sixteen foot median in blocks 1200 and 1300 of O.C. Haley Blvd. The current median could be updated to conform with the streetscape upgrade to insure conformity with the total project. b] Begin on the uptown end of the median that approaches the corners of Thalia and Erato Streets and reduce the proposed median to the current three foot and after fifty foot minimum, expand the median to the proposed sixteen foot to the end of the median. These steps are necessary to allow the Brown's Dairy vehicles a safe entrance and exit from the dairy.

In response to this comment, the plan proposed at the April 2013 public meeting has been altered to accommodate Brown's Dairy delivery trucks.

32. I'd like to provide some comments on the current conceptual designs for the OC Haley project. I'm really pleased to see this project moving forward as part of the revitalization of the OC Haley

commercial corridor. The design elements as proposed are largely in line with the City's Complete Streets ordinance, balancing the needs of all users: pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and motor vehicles. The expansion of the neutral ground and addition of the bike lane are great changes to the road that will improve the safety and comfort of the roadway. I strongly support these proposals.

The one thing that I really don't support is the removal of the raised neutral ground between Felicity and Martin Luther King Blvd. This proposal runs counter to the goals of promoting safety along the corridor. The lack of a neutral ground in this segment will allow traffic to move faster and turn midblock, creating more conflict points with oncoming traffic (cars, bikes and pedestrians). I hear the motivation for removing the neutral ground is to facilitate street festivals. However, I don't believe our roadways should be designed for the infrequent event (a street festival), but should be designed for the everyday safety and comfort of all users. So I hope that specific design features is reconsidered and the OC Haley neural ground is retained as a raised neutral ground to provide for safer pedestrian crossings and corridor beautification.

Thank you for your comment. In response to this and other similar concerns, the project plans as proposed at the April 2013 public meeting have changed. The neutral ground between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. will now include a 6 inch vertical curb to prevent motorists from making illegal and unsafe mid-block U-turns. Pedestrians cut-through will be added to the median from Felicity St. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. to maintain movement during the annual festival and future plans for the corridor.

33. I am a resident of the OC Haley corridor and I work along the boulevard and am a patron of many of its businesses. I am writing to express my support for the improvement of the street in general. And I am especially in support of the reduction of the travel lanes, the addition of the bike lane, and the widening of median, or neutral ground. However, I am adamantly opposed to the proposed removal of the median on the grounds that will cause serious safety hazards.

Thank you for your comment. In response to this and other similar concerns, the project plans as proposed at the April 2013 public meeting have changed. The neutral ground between Felicity St. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. will now include a 6 inch vertical curb to prevent motorists from making illegal and unsafe mid-block U-turns.

34. By widening median at Thalia Street and OC Haley would potentially create a problem for large trucks. Brown Dairy trucks make wide turns over median now. This would make it even harder.

DPW has met with Brown's Dairy and has altered the design plans proposed at the April 2013 public meeting to accommodate this request.

35. Can creative/artistic designs be used in place of striping between Felicity St. and Martin L. King, Jr. Blvd.?

No. Roadway striping will meet the DPW approved traffic safety guidance standards. There is no opportunity for creative markings to be incorporated into the roadway as part of this project.

Note - Identifiable information provided by the individual who submitted a comment has been removed from this document. The content of the comment may have also been shortened for clarity.